Cast of Characters

Speaking Characters

LYSISTRATA
CALONICE
MYRRHINE
LAMPTO
MEN'S CHORUS LEADER
CHORUS OF OLD MEN
WOMEN'S CHORUS LEADER
CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN
COUNCILOR
OLD WOMEN #1, #2, AND #3
WOMEN #1, #2, AND #3
CINESIAS
CINESIAS' BABY
SPARTAN HERALD
UNITED CHORUS
UNITED CHORUS LEADER
SPARTAN AMBASSADOR
ATHENIAN AMBASSADORS #1 AND #2

Nonspeaking Characters

ATHENIAN WOMEN
BOEOTIAN WOMAN
CORINTHIAN WOMAN
SPARTAN AND OTHER FOREIGN WOMEN
FEMALE SCYTHIAN GUARD
TWO SLAVES
FOUR MALE SCYTHIAN GUARDS
CINESIAS' SLAVE
ATHENIAN AMBASSADORS
SPARTAN AMBASSADOR
THE AMBASSADORS' SLAVES
RECONCILIATION
Piper

Lysistrata

SCENE: A large rectangular stage behind a bare circular area with an altar in the middle. Two ramplike entrances to the circular area at the left and right. A stage building with up to three doors in front, and a hatch to allow actors onto the roof. Scene descriptions and stage directions occur nowhere in an ancient Greek dramatic text, but the context here suggests that the action begins on the lower slopes of the Acropolis or in an Athenian residential district. The action later moves to the outside of the Propylaeum, or ceremonial gates leading to the top of the Acropolis, then probably to lower Athens again, and then to the outside of a banqueting hall. But the action should be considered continuous or nearly continuous: a Greek chorus remained the whole time after its entrance, and scene changes in an open-air theater with no curtain would have been sketchy.

(Enter Lysistrata, a good-looking young matron.)

LYSISTRATA: If I'd invited them to hoot and prance
At Bacchic rites, or at some sleazy shrine, I would have had to crawl through tambourines
To get here. As it is, no woman's showed,
Except my neighbor Calonice. Hi.

(Enter Calonice, a middle-aged matron.)

CALONICE: Hi. Lysistrata. Honey, what's gone wrong?

1. The name means "Dissolver of Armies." A real woman, the contemporary priestess of Athena Polias ("of the City"), appears to have had a similar name, Lysimache ("Dissolver of Combat").

2. Women gathered at special shrines to hold certain single-sex religious rites. Aristophanes names four spots: "a place of Bacchic revelry" (for rites of Dionysus, the wine god), "a [grotto] of Pan" (a rural god), "Colias" (site of a sanctuary of Aphrodite, the goddess of erotic love), and "a [shrine] of Genetyllis" (a goddess of childbirth). A suspicion of drunkenness and even of sexual license hovered over the events, nearly the only ones in which men could not control women's behavior.

3. "Beautiful Victory."
Don’t spoil your pretty face with ratty snarls!  
Your eyebrows look like bows to shoot me dead.

**LYSISTRATA:**  
Oh, Calonice, this just burns me up.  
Women are slacking off, can’t make the grade.  
Our husbands say we’re cunning to the point  
Of—well—depravity.

**CALONICE:**  
Darn tootin’ right!

**LYSISTRATA:**  
But given word to meet me here today—  
A vital matter needs our serious thought—  
They’re sleeping in.

**CALONICE:**  
But sweetie, soon they’ll come.  
Sometimes it’s quite a challenge sneaking out.  
The husband might require some straightening up,  
The maid a screech to get her out of bed,  
The kid a bath, a nibble, or a nap.

**LYSISTRATA:**  
But what I have to say means more than that  
To women.

**CALONICE:**  
Precious, what is eating you?  
Why summon us in this mysterious way?  
What is it? Is it . . . big?

**LYSISTRATA:**  
Of course.

**CALONICE:**  
And hard?

**LYSISTRATA:**  
Count on it.

**CALONICE:**  
Then how could they not have come?

**LYSISTRATA:**  
Oh, shut your mouth. They *would* have flocked for that.

**LYSISTRATA:**  
No, this thing I’ve gone through exhaustively;  
I’ve worked it over, chewed it late at night.

**CALONICE:**  
Pathetic if it needed that much help.

**LYSISTRATA:**  
It’s this pathetic: in the women’s hands  
Is the salvation of the whole of Greece.

**CALONICE:**  
In women’s hands? It’s hanging by a thread.

**LYSISTRATA:**  
We hold within our grasp the city’s plight.  
The Peloponnesians may be wiped out—

**CALONICE:**  
By Zeus, that’s best, as far as we’re concerned—

**LYSISTRATA:**  
And the Boeotians with them, root and branch—

**CALONICE:**  
All of them, fine, except those gorgeous eels.

**LYSISTRATA:**  
I won’t say Athens, since the omen’s bad.  
Imagine if I’d said it—shocking, huh?  
If all the women come together here—  
Boeotians, Peloponnesians, and the rest—  
And us—together we can salvage Greece.

**CALONICE:**  
What thoughtful thing could women ever do?  
What vivid venture? We just sit decked out  
In saffron gowns, makeup about this thick,  
Cimberian* lingerie, and platform shoes.

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4. The Peloponnesians and the Boeotians were the chief enemies of Athens during the Peloponnesian War.
5. The eels from Lake Copaïs were a culinary export sorely missed during the war, when trade restrictions were in force.
6. May refer to the Crimean region; in any case, the clothing is exotic.
LYSISTRATA:
It's those that I intend to save our race:
Those dresses, and perfume, and rouge, and shoes,
And little see-through numbers that we wear.

CALONICE:
How's that?

LYSISTRATA:
The men surviving won't lift up
Their spears (against each other, anyway).

CALONICE:
By the Two Gods, I've got a dress to dye!

LYSISTRATA:
Or shields—

CALONICE:
I've got a negligee to try!

LYSISTRATA:
Or knives—

CALONICE:
Ooh, ooh, and shoes! And shoes to buy!

LYSISTRATA:
So shouldn't all the other women come?

CALONICE:
Well, YES! With wings to boost them, hours ago!

LYSISTRATA:
It's such a bitch assembling Attica. You know they'd rather die than be on time.
Nobody even came here from the coast, or out of Salamis.

CALONICE:
I'm sure they got
Up on those mounts of theirs at break of day.

LYSISTRATA:
I thought it would be only logical
For the Acharnians to start the crowd, but they're not here yet.

CALONICE: Well, Theogones' wife
Has raised her glass to us—any excuse.
No, wait. Look thataway: here come a few.

LYSISTRATA:
And now a couple more.
(Several women straggle in, among them Myrrhine, a young and beautiful matron.)

CALONICE: Yuck, what a smell!
Where are they from?

LYSISTRATA: The puke-bush swamp.

CALONICE: By Zeus,
It must be quite a place to raise a stink.

10. Literally, "straddled the yachts" or "mounted astride horses," with a joke on a sexual position with the woman on top.
11. The deme of Acharnae had been repeatedly and particularly badly ravaged by the invading Spartan army earlier in the war, while its inhabitants stayed in Athens for safety. In Aristophanes' play Acharnians, the chorus is a group of old men from this deme, first opposing peace but then won over.
12. A puzzling pair of lines. This Theogones has not been firmly identified. His wife either "consulted [the goddess] Hecate" about coming, or "lifted her sail/wine cup."
13. The deme of Anagyros was swampy and full of a malodorous bush that gave its name to the place. "To shake the anagyros" meant to cause trouble.
MYRRHINE: Ooh, Lysistrata, are we very late? Too mad to say?
LYSISTRATA: Why should I not be mad? This is important! Why not come on time?
MYRRHINE: Well, it was dark—I couldn’t find my thing—
But say what’s on your mind, now that we’re here.
LYSISTRATA: No, wait a little while. The other wives,
The Boeotians and the Peloponnesians,
Are on the way.
MYRRHINE: All right, of course we’ll wait.
Look over there, though—that’s not Lampito?
(Enter Lampito, a strapping woman in a distinct,
more revealing costume. Several others in various
foreign dress accompany her, including a Boeotian
and a Corinthian Woman.)
LYSISTRATA: Darling Laconian, Lampito, hail!
How I admire your gleaming gorgeousness,
Your radiant skin, your body sleek and plump.
I bet that you could choke a bull.
LAMPITO: I could.
I’m in such shape I kick my own sweet ass.

CALONICE: (Prodding curiously.)
And what a brace of boobs. How bountiful!
LAMPITO: What am I s’posed to be? A pig for sale?
LYSISTRATA: And what’s this other young thing’s origin?
LAMPITO: Boeotia sent her as a delegate.
She’s at your service.
MYRRHINE: (Peeking under woman’s clothes.)
Boeotian—sure enough:
Just look at what a broad and fertile plain.
CALONICE: (Peeking likewise.)
She’s even pulled the weeds. Now that is class.
LYSISTRATA: And what’s the other girl?
LAMPITO: Corinthian.
Hell, ain’t she fine?
LYSISTRATA: Damn right she’s fine . . . from here,
And get another angle on her—wow!
LAMPITO: We’re like a women’s army. Who put out
The word to assemble?
LYSISTRATA: That was me.
LAMPITO: How come?
Tell us what’s going on.

14. Probably something like “Bearded Clam.”
16. From the word for “shining,” or “light.”
17. Spartan women were more active than their counterparts in Athens
and even exercised in public. Their health must indeed have been better
than that of women mostly confined to their homes.
18. A Spartan dance involved jumping and slapping one’s own soles
against the buttocks.
19. Literally, “You finger me like a sacrificial victim.” An animal
offered to a god had to be a perfect specimen.
20. “Pennyroyal,” a characteristic Boeotian plant, could also mean
“pubic hair.” Careful female grooming included plucking or burning
pubic hair into some tidy shape.
CALONICE: Yeah, honey, what? What all-important brrr is up your butt?

LYSISTRATA: The time has come. But first you answer me One weensy little thing.

CALONICE: Okay. Just ask.

LYSISTRATA: I know you all have husbands far from home On active service. Don’t you miss the men, The fathers of your children, all this time?

CALONICE: My husband’s been away five months in Thrace. Somebody’s gotta watch the general.21

MYRRHINE: Mine’s been in Pylos22 seven freaking months.

LAMPIOT: Once in a while, mine’s back, but then he’s off. It’s like that shield’s a friggin’ pair of wings.

LYSISTRATA: And since the Milesians deserted us23 (Along with every scrap of lover here), We’ve even lost those six-inch substitutes, Those dinky dildos for emergencies. If I could find a way to end this war, Would you be willing partners?

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21. “Guarding Eucrates,” probably the brother of the general Nicias, who had played a dismal role in the Sicilian expedition. Nothing further about Eucrates’ circumstances is known.

22. A fortified coastal city in the Peloponnese, which Athens had occupied since 425 B.C.E.

23. Mileus revolted from the Delian League, or Athenian empire, in 412 B.C.E., the year before the first production of Lysistrata. Dildos were apparently one of Mileus’ exports.

CALONICE: I sure would.

I’d sacrifice my nicest dress to buy Some wine (and sacrifice the wine to me).

MYRRHINE: I’d cut myself in two and donate half— A flat slice like a bottom-feeding fish.

LAMPIOT: I’d hike clear up Mount Taygetus24 to see If peace is flashin’ somewhere way far off.

LYSISTRATA: Fine. So. Here goes. You need to know the plan. Yes, ladies. How we force the men to peace. How are we going to do it? We must all Hold off—

CALONICE: From what?

LYSISTRATA: You’re positive you will?

CALONICE: We’ll do it! Even if it costs our lives.

LYSISTRATA: From now on, no more penises for you. (The women begin to disperse.)

Wait! You can’t all just turn and walk away! And what’s this purse-lipped shaking of your heads? You’re turning pale—is that a tear I see? Will you or not? You can’t hold out on me!

CALONICE: No, I don’t think so. Let the war go on.

MYRRHINE: Me? Not a chance in hell, so screw the war.

Lysistrata:
That's it, my piscine heroine? You said
Just now that you'd bisect yourself for peace.

Calonice:
Anything else for me. I'd walk through fire,
But do without a dick? Be serious!
There's nothing. Lysistrata, like a dick.

Lysistrata: (Turning to Woman #1.)
And you?

Woman #1:
Me? Mmm, I'll take the fire, thanks.

Lysistrata:
Oh, gender fit for boning up the butt!25
No wonder we're the stuff of tragedies:
Some guy, a bit of nookie, and a brat.26

(To Lampito.)

But you, sweet foreigner, if you alone
Stand with me, then we still could save the day.
Give me your vote!

Lampito:
Shit, it's no easy thing
To lie in bed alone without no dong . . .
But count me in. Peace we just gotta have.

Lysistrata:
The only woman in this half-assed horde!

Calonice:
Suppose we did—the thing you say we should—
Which gods forbid—what has that got to do
With peace?

25. A nearly literal translation. Anal sex was associated with shamelessness.
26. Literally, "Poseidon and a skiff." In a lost play of Sophocles, the heroine Tyro is seduced by the sea god Poseidon. Her twin sons, Pelias and Neleus, are set adrift in a small boat but rescued and eventually reunited with her.

Lysistrata:
A lot, I promise you. If we
Sit in our quarters, powdered daintily,
As good as nude in those imported slips,
And—just—slink by, with crotches nicely groomed,27
The men will swell right up and want to boink,
But we won't let them near us, we'll refuse—
Trust me, they'll make a treaty at a dash.

Lampito:
You're right! You know how Menelaus saw
Helen's bazooms and threw his weapon down.28

Calonice:
But what if they just shrug and walk away?

Lysistrata:
For them, there's just one place a dildo fits.29

Calonice:
As if a fake is lots of fun for us.
Suppose they grab us, drag us into bed.
We'll have no choice.

Lysistrata:
Resist. Hang on the door.

Calonice:
Suppose they beat us.

Lysistrata:
Yield a lousy lay.
They force a woman, and it's no more fun.
Plus, no more housework! They'll give up—you'll see
How fast. No husband's going to like to screw
Unless he knows his woman likes it too.

27. See line 89 and note.
28. In one version of the myth, Menelaus intended to kill his wife when he got her back after the fall of Troy but was overcome by her beauty.
29. This is the best I could do with a line based on a literary allusion for which we have little context: "Do what Pherecrates [a comic playwright] says/does, and skin the skinned bitch," orders Lysistrata. The metaphor is thought to have referred to frustration and hopelessness, and here somehow plays comically on the idea of leather dildos.
CALONICE:
If that's the thing you're set on, fine—okay.

LAMPITO:
We'll force the Spartan husbands into peace:
No cheating, quibbling, squabbling any more.30
But what about them lowlives in your town?
What'll you do so they don't run amok?31

LYSISTRATA:
We'll handle things on our side. Don't you fret.

LAMPITO:
I will. You know that god of yours has got
An expense account for sails and all the rest.32

LYSISTRATA:
We've put aside that obstacle ourselves.
Today we occupy the citadel.
This is the mission of the senior squad.
While we confer here, they've gone up to fake
A sacrifice and storm the Acropolis.

LAMPITO:
You are a clever thang. Fine all around!

LYSISTRATA:
Let's quickly swear an oath, my friend, and set
Our concord up unbendable as bronze.33

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30. The Spartans had a reputation for sharp dealing. This obloquy in the mouth of a Spartan wife is not dramatically plausible, but the Athenian audience must have enjoyed it.
31. The Athenian lower classes, from which the navy's rowers were drawn, tended to support the war that provided them with work, pay, and prestige. Also, the navy was the basis of the lucrative empire that provided pork-barrel benefits for all Athenian citizens, especially the poor.
32. On the fortified and magnificently built up Acropolis, under the authority of the goddess Athena, was the treasury of the Delian League, which financed Athens' war effort. Even when virtually besieged by land, Athens continued to enforce revenue collection by sea.
33. The following scene is a parody of men's oath ceremonies. For peace agreements, wine and not a slaughtered beast sanctified the words. For the wrong reasons, the women are about to make the right choice.

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LYSISTRATA:

LAMPITO:
Give us whatever oath you wanna give.

LYSISTRATA:
So where's the guard? (I'm talking to you! Wake up!)34
(Enter Female Scythian Guard in an exotic uniform.)
Bring here your shield and set it upside down.
(She obeys. The women pause.)
Now where's the sacrifice?

CALONICE: What can we find
To swear on, Lysistrata?

LYSISTRATA:
Aeschylus
Had people drain the blood of slaughtered sheep
Into a shield.35
CALONICE: A shield? To swear for peace?
Excuse me, honey, but that can't be right.

LYSISTRATA:
What else, then?
CALONICE: We could find a giant stud,
A pure white stallion, say, and hack him up.

LYSISTRATA: What do you mean, a horse?36
CALONICE: We need to swear

34. The local security force in Athens consisted mainly of foreign archers, slaves generically referred to as "Scythians." Lysistrata summons a "Scythianess," the (to the Athenians) ludicrous female version of a policeman.
35. Based on a line from Aeschylus' Seven against Thebes.
36. Scholars do not know, either. There may be some kind of joke here, with "white horse" standing for a penis.
On something.

LYSISTRATA: Listen up! I know the way:
A big black drinking bowl laid on its back;
A jar of Thasian to sacrifice;
An oath to mix no water with the wine.\(^{37}\)

LAMPITO:
Shit sakes, I like that more than I can say.

LYSISTRATA:
Somebody bring a jar out, and a bowl.
(The items are brought.)

MYRRHINE:
Hey, sisters, that’s some massive pottery!

CALONICE: (Snatching.)
Just fondling it, you’d start to feel real good.

LYSISTRATA:
Put the bowl down and help me hold the beast.\(^{38}\)

(Calonice relinquishes her hold. All the women join in
lifting the jar.)

Holy Persuasion, and our Bowl for Pals,
Be gracious toward this women’s sacrifice.
(Lysistrata opens the jar. The women pour.)

CALONICE:
Propitiously the gleaming blood spurts forth!

LAMPITO:
By Castor,\(^{39}\) and it smells real pretty too.

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\(^{37}\) Drinking unmixed wine was a fairly extreme indulgence. Even at men’s drinking parties, which could easily end in orgies, water was poured into the wine in fixed proportions.

\(^{38}\) The jar; the sacrificial animal was handled in a prescribed manner.

\(^{39}\) Castor and Polydeuces, twin sons of Zeus, were demigods important in Sparta.

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LYSISTRATA: Girls, let me be the first to swear the oath.\(^{40}\)

CALONICE: No way, by Aphrodite. We’ll draw lots.

LYSISTRATA: Grip the bowl’s rim, Lampito and the rest.
(They obey.)

One of you, speak for all, repeat my words,
Then everybody else confirm the oath.
Neither my boyfriend nor my wedded spouse—

CALONICE: Neither my boyfriend nor my wedded spouse—

LYSISTRATA: Shall touch me when inflated. Say it, girl!

CALONICE:
Shall touch me when inflated. Holy hell!
Knees—Lysistrata—wobbly. Gonna faint!

LYSISTRATA: (Sternly, ignoring this distress.)
I shall stay home unhumped both night and day,

CALONICE: I shall stay home unhumped both night and day,

LYSISTRATA: While wearing makeup and a flashy dress,

CALONICE: While wearing makeup and a flashy dress,

LYSISTRATA: That I may give my man the scorching hots,

CALONICE: That I may give my man the scorching hots,

LYSISTRATA: But I will not consent to what he wants,

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\(^{40}\) The first to swear would also be the first to drink.
CALONICE:
But I will not consent to what he wants,

LYSISTRATA:
And if he forces me, against my will,

CALONICE:
And if he forces me, against my will,

LYSISTRATA:
Then I will sulk, I will not hump along;

CALONICE:
Then I will sulk, I will not hump along;

LYSISTRATA:
I will not point my slippers at the roof;

CALONICE:
I will not point my slippers at the roof;

LYSISTRATA:
Not, like a lion knickknack, ass in air—

CALONICE:
Not, like a lion knickknack, ass in air—

LYSISTRATA:
Abiding by these vows, may I drink wine;

CALONICE:
Abiding by these vows, may I drink wine;

LYSISTRATA:
If I transgress, let water fill the bowl.

CALONICE:
If I transgress, let water fill the bowl.

LYSISTRATA:
Now do you all consent?

ALL: By Zeus, we do.

LYSISTRATA:
I dedicate this bowl. (She drinks heartily.)

CALONICE: Just drink your share!
We’ve got to work together, starting now.

(All drink. A mass ululation is heard offstage.)

LAMPTO: Somebody’s shouting.

LYSISTRATA: As I said before:
It’s our contingent on the citadel.
They’ve taken it already. Lampito,
You go arrange things back in Sparta. These

(Indicates Spartan Women.)
Will need to stay with us as hostages.42
We’ll join the rest of the Athenians
And help them heave the bars behind the doors.

CALONICE: You think the men will find out right away
And all gang up on us?

LYSISTRATA: The hell with them.
They can’t make threats or fires fierce enough.
These doors stay shut. We only open them
On those exact conditions we’ve set down.

CALONICE: So Aphrodite help us, we’ll stay put,
Or not deserve the cherished title “Bitch.”

(All the women exit into stage building.)

(Enter a Chorus of twelve Old Men, carrying logs, unlit torches, and pots of burning charcoal.)

41. Literally, “I will not assume the position of a lioness on a cheese grater.” Ornamental lions were typically depicted set to pounce, crouching in front but with their hindquarters raised.

42. It was a normal precaution to keep hostages to ensure compliance with an international agreement.
MEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
Dracæ, lead on, ignore your throbbing back
Under the fresh, green weight of olive trunks.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
A long life brings lots
That’s surprising to see.
This, Strumodorus, is a new one on me.
At our expense
This pestilence
Festered at home indoors.
They’ve taken our citadel!
Athena’s image as well!\(^43\)
They’ve barred the ceremonial gates,\(^44\) the whores!

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Straight ahead is the fortress, Philurgus.
To pile up one pyre and set it afire
For all with a hand in this wicked affair
Can pass without debate or amendments
Or special pleading—well, first get Lycon’s wife.\(^45\)

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
Demeter’s my witness, this stunt isn’t cute.
Like Cleomenes, these girls won’t find it a hoot.
Cocks! Spartan! He went away,
Dealt with efficiently, let’s say,
His arms surrendered. He wore a crappy trace
Of the clothes that he came in.
He was blasted with famine,
With six hard years of beard and crud on his face.

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Fierce was the siege that we sat for the bastard,
Camping in seventeen ranks at the bulwark.\(^46\)

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43. An ancient wooden statue of Athena.
44. The Propylaea, a massive structure through which important processions passed.
45. Lycon was a prominent politician whose wife had a reputation for promiscuity.
46. A gross exaggeration of a brief seizure of the Acropolis by a Spartan king in 508 B.C.E.—much too early for the speakers to have played any part.

But the gods and Euripides both detest women.\(^47\)
I’ll cram their impertinence straight back inside—
If I don’t, take my Marathon monument down.\(^48\)

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
The cliff in the road
Where I haul my load
Is right before me, I have come so fast.
Too bad—no mule!
So much to pull.
Literally, this is a pain in the ass.
But I won’t tire—
I’ll puff the fire—
Won’t get distracted—it’s got to last!

(They blow, recoil.)
Oh shit, the smoke!
I’m going to choke!

From the basin where it slept,
Lord Hercules, how savagely it leapt,
Like a rabid bitch, to bite me in the eyes.
It’s Lemnian, I think,
From the land where women stink.\(^49\)
It reeks of everything that I despise.
Up to the heights!
Defend our rights!
The goddess needs us, don’t you realize?

(They blow, recoil.)
Oh hell, the ash!
I’m going to crash!

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47. The tragedian Euripides’ searing depictions of rebellious women made him a frequent comic butt as a misogynist.
48. To have fought against the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E., these men would have to be about a hundred years old.
49. In a myth unaccountably never exploited by the advertisers of feminine deodorants, Aphrodite punished the women of Lemnos, who had neglected her rites, by inflicting a foul odor on them. They then murdered their disgusted and defecting husbands. Lemnos also had certain geological and ritual associations with fire. The passage contains an untranslatable pun on the word for the pus from sore eyes.
MEN'S CHORUS LEADER:

Gods answer our prayers and the fire rears high.
Assignment The First: put the logs on the ground.
Here are some torches to ram in the brazier.
Rush then, and batter yourselves on the gates.
310 Call for surrender. A slit should spread open.
Otherwise, light the gates, smoke the broads out.
Put down your logs, men. (This smoke is a hassle!)
The generals in Samos are shirking the work.50

(He heaves his wood down.)

That's better—the load has stopped warping my back.

This bucket of coals has the task to provide
Me—hey, me first!—with a virulent torch.
Great goddess Victory,51 give me a prize52
For feminine insolence valiantly squashed.

(The men busy themselves with lighting torches.)

(A Chorus of twelve Old Women enter from the opposite side, carrying water jars.)

WOMEN'S CHORUS LEADER:

Women, that bright thing in a murky cloud—
320 Is it a fire? Quick, let's get on the scene.

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN:

Nicodice, hurry!
Calyce's getting lit!
Cirilla's getting buffeted
By blazing winds
And old men full of shit.
Oh, dear! Oh, my! Am I too late?
I went at dawn to wrangle free this water.
I struggled through the crash and screech and slaughter—
Elbows flailing, jars askew—

50. The Athenian navy was based at Samos during this period.
51. Athena Nike (Victory) had a temple to the right of those entering the Propylaea.
52. "A trophy," which for the Greeks was a tree or post with the enemy's arms hung on it.
53. A runaway or other criminal slave might be punished with tattooing or branding.
54. "As if to heat a bath" with wood as the fuel.
55. All three references in the women's prayer are to Athena. She has a "golden crest" on her helmet. The last reference is obscure; Athena was normally said to have been born from the head of Zeus.
Aristophanes

We'd better whack them with this wood instead.

Women's Chorus Leader:
Girls, put your pitchers down, out of the way,
So if they lift a hand, we'll be prepared.

Men's Chorus Leader:
If somebody had done a proper job
Of slapping them, they'd keep their yappers shut. 56

Women's Chorus Leader:
Fine. Try it. Here's a cheek for you to smack.
And then I'll tear your balls off like a bitch.

Men's Chorus Leader:
Shut up! I'll pound you hollow if you don't.

Women's Chorus Leader:
Just put a fingertip on Stratyllis—

Men's Chorus Leader:
And if I pummel her? What will you do?

Women's Chorus Leader:
I'll gnaw your lungs and claw your entrails out.

Men's Chorus Leader:
Euripides is my authority
On women: "She's a creature lacking shame." 57

Women's Chorus Leader:
Honey, we'd better lift these jars again.

Men's Chorus Leader:
What did you bring the water for, you scum?

Women's Chorus Leader:
And what's the fire for, you senile coots?
Fogies flambés?

Men's Chorus Leader:
A funeral for your friends!

Women's Chorus Leader:
We'll put the pyre out before it's lit.

Men's Chorus Leader:
You'd meddle with my fire?

Women's Chorus Leader:
As you'll see.

Men's Chorus Leader:
Maybe I ought to toast you with this torch.

Women's Chorus Leader:
Have you got soap? I've got the water here.

Men's Chorus Leader:
A bath, you rancid hag?

Women's Chorus Leader:
Get clean, get laid. 58

Men's Chorus Leader:
You hear what nerve—?

Women's Chorus Leader:
Why not? I'm not a slave.

Men's Chorus Leader:
I'll squelch that yelp.

Women's Chorus Leader:
You're not the judge of me! 59

Men's Chorus Leader:
Set fire to her hair!

(The men threaten with their torches.)

56. The lines refer to Bupalus as an assault victim. He was a sixth-century B.C.E. sculptor who feuded with the poet Hipponax and committed suicide because of the violently abusive verse directed at him. The allusion is an excellent one to illustrate a fight that will turn out to be mostly verbal.

57. See line 283 and note. Here Aristophanes may be quoting directly from a tragedy.

58. Literally, "This is in fact a wedding [bath]."

59. Literally, "But you're no longer serving on a jury." Through juries, the humblest citizens could exercise public authority and earn regular income. Idle old men had a reputation for addiction to jury service. See Aristophanes' Wasps.
WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Help, River God!  
(The women empty one set of pitchers over the men.)

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Hell!

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Oh, was that too hot?
(The women make use of auxiliary pitchers.)

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Hot?! Stop it, slut!

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
I’m watering you so you’ll grow nice and high.

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
I’m shivering and shaking myself dry.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
But you’ve got fire to warm your footses by.
(Enter Councilor, accompanied by Two Slaves with crowbars, and Four Male Scythian Guards.)

COUNCILOR:
These flaming women, spoiled with kettledrums,  
And ritual howls, and this Adonis thing—
You hear them whoop it up—they’re on the roofs—
Exactly like in the Assembly once.
Demonstratus—goddamn him—made the speech  
That sent us into Sicily. Just then

60. “Achelous,” standing for the power of water.
61. A couple of years before the production of Lysistrata, in the breakdown after the Sicilian expedition, a board of ten councilors took over much of the city’s administration from the Council of Five Hundred (see note 128). This character is one of the special councilors.
62. See note 34.
63. “Cries of ‘Sabazius!’,” who was a newly adopted Eastern deity.
64. During the festival of Adonis, women went onto the roofs of their homes to ritually mourn for Adonis, a mythical young favorite of Aphrodite killed in a hunt.
65. An island to the west of Greece, allied to Athens.
66. An untranslatable pun on Demonstratus’ family name.
67. The Greeks were highly superstitious. After many of their young men died in the disastrous Sicilian expedition (launched in 415 B.C.E.), an Athenian might well recall the bad omen of a woman heard mourning for a beautiful young man while the Assembly heard proposals for the expedition. But Aristophanes’ target is the self-righteous silliness of the speaker, who, we can tell by an easy read between the lines, supported the expedition himself. He blames the disaster chiefly on one drunken woman, rather than on the people who sold citizens a terrible idea, or on the citizens who bought it.
68. “Sailing to Salamis” probably had a sexual meaning.
Rubbed by her sandal strap? Drop by at noon
And give her hole a jimmy and a stretch.”
No wonder it’s resulted in this mess.
I AM A COUNCILOR. It is my JOB
To find the wood for oars and PAY FOR IT.
And now these WOMEN shut the gates on me!
It’s no good standing here. Those crowbars, quick!
I’ll separate these women from their gall.

(A slave is indecisive.)
Hey, slack-jaw, move! What are you waiting for?
You’re looking for a pub where you can hide?
Both of you, put these levers in the gates
From that side, and from here I’ll stick mine in
And help you shove.

(Lysistrata emerges from the stage building.)

LYSISTRATA:
Right, you can shove those bars.
It doesn’t take a tool to bring me out.
You don’t need siege equipment here. Just brains.

COUNCILOR:
Really, you walking poo? Where is that guard?
Grab her and tie her hands behind her back.

LYSISTRATA:
By Artemis, if that state property’s
Fingertip touches me, I’ll make him wail.

(Guard backs away.)

COUNCILOR:
You’re scared of her? Grab her around the waist,
And you—look sharp and help him tie her hands.

(Old Woman #1 enters from door.)

OLD WOMAN #1:
Pandrosus⁶⁹ help me. Lay one cuticle
On her, and I shall beat you till you shit.

(The two guards slink off.)

COUNCILOR:
Such language! Where’d the other archer go?
Get this one first. Just hear that potty mouth!

(Old Woman #2 enters from door.)

OLD WOMAN #2:
By Phosphorus⁷⁰, one hangnail grazes her,
And you’ll be nursing eyes as black as tar.

(Third guard retreats.)

COUNCILOR:
What is this? Where’s a guard? Get hold of her!
One little expedition’s at an end.

(Old Woman #3 enters from door.)

OLD WOMAN #3:
Go near her, by Tauropolis,⁷¹ and I
Will give you screaming lessons on your hair.

(Fourth guard makes himself scarce.)

COUNCILOR:
Now I’m in deep. I’ve got no archers left.
We can’t let women have the final stomp!
Scythians, we must form a battle line
And march straight at them.

(Guards reluctantly gather together again from
a distance.)

LYSISTRATA:
You’ll find out, I swear,
That we’ve got four divisions tucked away,
Heavy-armed women itching for a fight.

COUNCILOR:
Attendants, twist their arms behind their backs.

(The guards advance.)

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⁶⁹. An Athenian princess of myth.
⁷¹. Artemis, an epithet perhaps meaning “Drawn in a Cart by a Bull.”
LYSISTRATA:
Thunder out, allied women, from the walls!
Sellers of garlic, gruel, and poppy seeds,
Greengrocers, bakers, landladies—attack!
Yank them and shove them! Sock them! Hammer them!
(Insult, belittle them—get really coarse!

(A mob of women enters and descends on the guards
with physical and verbal abuse.)

Fall back! To strip their dignity’s enough. 72
(The women retreat. The guards lie flattened
and immobile.)

COUNCILOR:
My bodyguard reduced to diddly-squat!

LYSISTRATA:
But what were you expecting? Facing troops?
Or herding slaves? Apparently you don’t
Think we have guts.

COUNCILOR:
The female gut’s quite deep:
I’ve seen the way that you perform in bars.

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Hey you, our Councilor: you’re wasting words
By arguing with wild things like a fool.
They didn’t even let us get undressed,
But bathed us without benefit of soap.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Well, you, sir, think your fellow citizens
Are fit for bullying. You want black eyes?
Given the choice, I’d play a prim, demure
Young girl, disturbing no one by so much
As blinking. I’m a hornet when I’m roused.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
O, Zeus, what shall we do with these vermin?

We can’t just take it. Let’s examine
How it happened,
Why these women
Plotted to snatch the boulder’d shrine,
Out of bounds, high in the air,
The Acropolis,
And make it theirs.

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER: (To Councilor.)
Challenge, refute! Whatever sounds right must be wrong!
If they shortchange us, it’s the ultimate disgrace.

COUNCILOR:
Right. Question Number One: I am anxious to hear
Your motivation for barring the fortress doors.

LYSISTRATA:
Keeping the money here will starve the war to death.

COUNCILOR:
Money—and war? Huh?

LYSISTRATA:
There’s a rat’s nest in this town.
Fisander and his public office-stalking ilk
Raised hell—it yielded marvelous chances to steal.
Who gives a hoot what they do now? The money’s safe.

COUNCILOR:
And your plan is—?

LYSISTRATA:
You have to ask? It’s management.

COUNCILOR:
Of public funds? By you?

LYSISTRATA:
And what’s so strange in that?
You let us women do the budgeting at home.

COUNCILOR:
It’s not the same at all!

72. "Do not strip [their armor]," orders Lysistrata, like a general giving
a command to abstain from plunder.

73. He actually helped lead a briefly successful coup later in 411 B.C.E.
Lysistrata:
Because—?

Councilor:
You don’t fight wars!

Lysistrata:
And you don’t have to either.

Councilor:
We’re in jeopardy!

Lysistrata:
We’ll save you.

Councilor:
You?

Lysistrata:
Yeah, us.

Councilor:
But that’s unthinkable.

Lysistrata:
Think what you like.

Councilor:
Unutterable.

Lysistrata:
No, uttered.

It doesn’t matter how you feel.

Councilor:
THIS ISN’T RIGHT!

Lysistrata:
Too bad.

Councilor:
BUT I DON’T WANT IT!

Lysistrata:
Then you need it more.

Councilor:
How can you meddle in the stern affairs of state?

Councilor:
The hand may be quicker than the mouth.

Lysistrata:
Listen! And keep a grip on your hands.

Councilor:
Can’t manage.

Woman #1:
And what you’re going to be is sore.

Councilor:
No, you’ll be sore, old buzzard! (To Lysistrata.) You, go on.

Lysistrata:
I will. Throughout this futile war, we women held our peace. Propriety (and husbands) permitted no peep.
To escape our mouths. But we weren’t exactly pleased. We did hear how things were going. When you had passed
Some subnormally thought-out, doom-laden decree.
We’d say, aching, but on the surface simpering,
“What rider to the treaty did you decide on Today at the Assembly?”
“That’s not your affair! Shut up.” And lo, I did shut up.

Old Woman #1:
I wouldn’t have.

Councilor:
We’d have clocked you if you didn’t.

Lysistrata:
That’s why I did. Another day we’d ask, about some even more
Malignant move, “Do you even think first, big boy?”

74. In 418 B.C.E., an important treaty engraved on a stele (stone column) was altered by an inscription saying that the Spartans had broken the treaty. This was obviously a provocative statement to incorporate into a public monument.
He'd glare, order me back to my wool and warn
That I could soon be wailing. "Men will see to the war."

COUNCILOR:
And right he was, by Zeus.

LYSISTRATA:
You worthless loser, why?
Because ineptitude's a shield against advice?
It got so you were yakking in the streets yourselves:
"We've got no men left in the country." "Yeah, no fake."

Hearing stuff like that, we decided women would
Muster and deliver Greece. Why piddle around?
We've got some useful things to tell you. If you stay
Quiet the way we always did, we'll set you straight.

COUNCILOR:
Insufferably presumptuous notion!

LYSISTRATA:
SHUT UP!!

COUNCILOR:
Shut up for you, abomination in a veil!
I'd sooner perish.

LYSISTRATA:
So you're hung up on the veil?
(The Councillor is mobbed and outfitted as a
housewife.)

Hang one on yourself. Try mine.
Drape it around your skull.
Sit on this chair. Don't whine!

OLD WOMAN #1:
Hike up your skirt, card gobs of wool
Into a basket on the floor.

LYSISTRATA:
Look dumb. Chew gum. The women will deal with the war.

LYSISTRATA:
Well, first of all, we'll stop
Those kooks who go shopping in battle gear.

OLD WOMAN #1:

Hell, yes!

LYSISTRATA:
They haul an armory among the pottery
And greens, and bash around—it's like some goddamn cult.

COUNCILOR:
They're dedicated men!

LYSISTRATA:
No, dedicated dweebs.

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76. Aphrodite.
78. "Like Corybantes"—ecstatic dancers with noisy armor. They were a byword for the mentally unstable.
They heft their doughty Gorgon shields\textsuperscript{79} and buy sardines.

OLD WOMAN #1:
A captain, streaming-haired, aloft upon his steed,
Proffered a bronze hat to be shaved full of soup.
A Thracian—just like Tereus\textsuperscript{80}—clattered his shield
And downed forthwith the figs of the routed vendor.

COUNCILOR:
But there's a perfect pandemonium worldwide.

LYSISTRATA:
Without a lot of strain.

COUNCILOR:
What?! How?

LYSISTRATA:
Say that the wool's a mass of tangles. Take it thus.

\textit{(Miming throughout.)}

Draw it apart with spindles—make some sense of it.
That's how we'll loosen up this war—if we're allowed.

Ambassadors are spindles—they can sort it out.

COUNCILOR:
Spindles and gobs of wool—it's just too fatuous.

We're in a crisis.

LYSISTRATA:
With a modicum of smarts,
You'd copy the administration of our wool.

COUNCILOR:
Do tell me how.

LYSISTRATA:
First, give the fleece a bath to dunk

\textsuperscript{79} The Gorgon was a mythological creature with a woman's face and snakes for hair. She was said to turn everyone who saw her into stone, so her image was a natural one to appear on shields.

\textsuperscript{80} A savage Thracian king of myth; see note 112. Thracians were thought of as semibarbarians, and Thracian mercenaries must have been fairly conspicuous in Athens.

Away the sheep dung, Spread your city on a bed
Next, and beat out all the layabouts and briars.
Then card out any clumps—you know, the cliques of clumps,
Magistracy-mongers.\textsuperscript{81} Pluck their little heads off.
Comb what's left into a single goodwill basket.

Wad in your resident aliens and other
Nice foreigners, and don't leave out public debtors.
And heck, as for the city's scattered colonies,
I want you to construe them as neglected tufts,
Each on its lonesome. Gather them all together,
Bunch them up tight, and finally you'll have one
Big ball. Use it to weave the city something fine.

COUNCILOR:
Wads and rods and balls—the paradigm's atrocious!

What have you got to do with war?

LYSISTRATA:
You scrap of scum,
We fight it twice: it's we who give the hoplites life,

And then we send them off, for you—

COUNCILOR:
That spot is sore!\textsuperscript{82}

LYSISTRATA:
Us young and frisky females, who must seize the night,
War puts to bed beside ourselves. But screw us wives:
I ache for the girls turned crones and never married.

COUNCILOR:
Don't men get old?

LYSISTRATA:
You know it's nothing like the same!

Any decrepit veteran, no questions asked,
Can get a child-bride, but a woman's chance is zip
After her prime. She sits there maiming daisies—crap!\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Oligarchic clubs. See lines 490-1 and Commentary 1, page 82.

\textsuperscript{82} Probably refers to the Sicilian expedition. See note 67.

\textsuperscript{83} "She sits, looking for omens."
COUNCILOR:
As long as men can get it up—

LYSISTRATA:
Why don’t you die and shut it up?

(The women mob the Councilor and dress and equip him as a corpse.)

600 We’ve got a plot. Just buy a box.
And here’s a wreath for you!
A honey-cake to bribe the dog—

OLD WOMAN #1:
And holy ribbons, too—

OLD WOMAN #2:
A coin to get you on the boat—

LYSISTRATA:
That’s all—it’s time to rush off.
Charon’s calling. Till he’s full
He’s not allowed to push off. 84

COUNCILOR:
Such disrespect for my authority!
I’ll march straight to the other councilors:

610 My person’s an indictment of your deeds.

(He exits with attendants. Lysistrata calls after him.)

LYSISTRATA:
You’re angry that we didn’t lay you out?
Don’t worry, sir. At dawn, two days from now,
We’ll come and give you the traditional rites.

(The women exit into the stage building.)

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Lovers of freedom, rouse yourselves from sleep!

615 Strip down, my friends, and take this problem on.

(They remove their cloaks.)

84. Grave goods reflected the myth that dead souls went to the Underworld past the guard dog Cerberus, who needed to be distracted with a cake, and over the river Styx with the boatman Charon.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
I’ve got a whiff of larger plans at work—
The reign of terror that we thought was gone 85
Suppose Laconians have gathered here
With someone—oooh, with Cleisthenes, let’s say—
To stir this goddamn plague of women up
And take my bare-essential jury pay. 87

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Scandalous! Women scold us citizens
And blab about a war they’ve never seen:
“We’ll RECONCILE you with LACONIANS.”
Give me a wolf to pet—I’m just as keen.
“I’ll hide my weapon under myrtle boughs.” 88
This plot against our precious liberty
I’ll foil. On guard against a tyranny,
I’ll march in armor while I shop and pose
Beside Aristogiton’s statue—see!

(Strokes a pose.)

And here’s a splendid opportunity
To bop this impious old troll’s nose!

(His fist is raised against the Women’s Chorus Leader.)

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Your mother’s going to think you’re someone else.
Ladies, lay down your wraps.

(They do so.)

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN:
We’re going to tell
The city several things it needs to know.
I owe it this. It brought me up so well:

85. The speaker refers to Hippias’ tyranny, which lasted until 510 B.C.E.
86. An effeminate often made fun of in the plays of Aristophanes. The joke is on the Spartans’ purported preference for anal sex.
87. The speaker’s anxiety is for the pork-barrel benefits of the democracy. See note 59.
88. A line from the drinking song celebrating Harmodius and Aristogiton’s plot to murder the tyrant Hippias during a festival.
At seven as a Mystery-Carrier;
A Grinder in the holy mill at ten;
Later, at Brauron, as a bright-robed Bear;
A comely, fig-decked Basket-Bearer then.\(^{89}\)

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
That’s why I’ll serve my city with a chat.
So I’m a woman—why should you resent
That I come forward with the best advice?
I’ve done my share and more; it’s men I’ve lent.
You wretched drool-bags, since the Persian Wars,
Just fritter our inheritance away.\(^{90}\)
No taxes to replace the cash you spend.
You’re going to ruin all of us someday.
You dare to gripe? Let out one vicious word,
I’ll send this slipper bashing through your beard.

(\textit{She removes a shoe and strikes a threatening pose with it.})

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
Isn’t this too obnoxious to ignore?
It started bad—how nasty can it get?
Justice and Truth rely on those with balls.

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Strip off your shirts, let women smell men’s sweat,
Stride free of wrappings hampering a fight.

(\textit{They comply.})

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
Remember how we manned Leipsydron?\(^{91}\)

\(^{89}\) These were important ritual functions carried out by virgin girls. The Carriers of Unspoken Things, and probably the Grinders, served Athena; the Bears served Artemis, their terms culminating in a dance in yellow robes at the town of Brauron. Girls carried ritual objects in baskets in many processions. It was most prestigious to be selected to carry the basket at the Panathenaeic festival, the greatest celebration of Athens’ imperial glory. Fig necklaces symbolized fertility.

\(^{90}\) A substantial reserve fund had accumulated, starting from Persian War spoils, but the present war had diminished it.

\(^{91}\) An Attic town fortified and manned briefly in the late sixth century B.C.E. in an effort to oust the tyrant Hippias.
Ismene,96 too (a well-connected girl). Pass seven laws against me, I don’t care—
Everyone hates you, in the whole known world! I have a friend, the sweet Boeotian eel. I wanted her to come, the other day, To share my festive rites of Hecate.97 Her keepers told me, “No. Because they say.”98 Either you stop it or you’ll learn a trick You won’t enjoy: to flip and break your neck. (It is several days later. Enter Lysistrata, visibly distressed.)

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Our queenly leader, chief conspirator,
Why come you forth in such a royal snit?

LYSISTRATA:
The dastard weakness of the female mind Bids me to pace in fury and despair.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Alas, what say you?

LYSISTRATA:
Naught but plainest truth.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
What dire news? Reveal it to your friends.

LYSISTRATA:
Shameful to speak, but heavy to withhold.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Hide not from me our sore calamity.99

LYSISTRATA:
Well, in a word, our movement’s getting fucked.

Women’s Chorus Leader:
Zeus!

Lysistrata:
Why call on Zeus? Our nature’s not his fault. And anyway, it’s me who can’t enforce Husband aversion. AWOL’s spreading fast. The other day I caught one near Pan’s cave, Making the hole a tunnel just her size.100 A second sought civilian status by Rappelling from a crane,101 another tried To ride a sparrow down to You-Know-Who’s,102 I had to grab her hair and drag her back. Trying for furloughs, they evoke a vast Supply of fiction. Here’s a sample now.

(Stops Woman #1, who has entered from the stage building and is dashing off toward the side.)

Where are you running to?

Woman #1:
I’m going home. I have to rescue my—Milesian wool From—moths. They’re going to shred it.

Lysistrata:
Moths, my ass! 730

Get back inside!

Woman #1: 
By the Two Gods,103 I will. I only need to spread it on the bed.

Lysistrata:
You’ll do no spreading, ’cause you’re staying put.

Woman #1:
I sacrifice my wool?

96. Probably the Boeotian Woman in the first scene.
97. A goddess of the Underworld.
98. See line 36 and note.
99. The preceding lines spoof the scenes in tragedy in which the chorus question a character emerging outdoors about events indoors. One line is said to come from a lost play of Euripides.
100. There was apparently an old hole here, narrowed or stopped up.
101. Equipment from the construction going on at the time.
102. "Orsilochus' place." He was a well-known brothel keeper. The sparrow is Aphrodite's sacred bird.
103. Demeter and Kore.
LYSISTRATA:

Yes, for the cause.

(Woman #2 enters in a tragic pose, scurrying away at the same time.)

WOMAN #2:

Pity me and my fine Amorgos flax,
At home, left on the stems!

LYSISTRATA:

Example B
Is skulking off to peel a pile of thread.
You, turn around!

WOMAN #2: (Stopping reluctantly.)
I swear by Hecate,
I’ll only stay to give it a good—shuck.

LYSISTRATA:

No shucking way. If I give in to you,
There’s going to be no end of applicants.

(Woman #3 enters, clutching a protruding stomach.)

WOMAN #3:

Goddess of Childbirth, spare me for an hour!
This place is sacrosanct—I’ve got to leave!

LYSISTRATA:

What is this crap?

WOMAN #3:

My baby’s almost here!

LYSISTRATA:

Yesterday you weren’t pregnant.

WOMAN #3:

Now I am!

104. The untranslatable joke is that flax had to be separated from its woody fibers, an action somewhat like pushing back the foreskin of an uncircumcised penis before sex. The same verb is used.
105. “Eileithyia.”
106. To give birth on sacred ground was not permitted.

Please, Lysistrata, let me go. The nurse is waiting for me.

LYSISTRATA:

Sounds a lot like bull.

(She feels the front of the woman’s dress.)

There’s something hard here.

WOMAN #3:

It’s a baby boy.

LYSISTRATA:

By Aphrodite, not my guess at all.
It’s hollow metal. Let me take a peek.

(She dives under the woman’s dress, emerges with a giant helmet.)

You idiot, the holy helmet’s here! You’re pregnant, huh?

WOMAN #3:

By Zeus, I swear I am.

LYSISTRATA:

And what’s this for?

WOMAN #3:

If I were overcome
On the way home, I’d have a kind of nest.
It seems to work for doves, at any rate.

LYSISTRATA:

No kidding, If that’s your excuse, then wait five days to have a party for this hat.

WOMAN #3:

But I can’t even sleep here since I saw the sacred snake. You gotta let me go!

107. Probably from Athena’s statue in the Parthenon.
108. The event named is the _amphidromia_, or family welcoming, performed five (or perhaps seven) days after the birth of a child.
109. Believed to live in a rocky crevice and associated with Erechtheus, a mythical king of Athens. On the site, the Erechtheum, a temple to Athena, Erechtheus, and other deities, was completed in 407 B.C.E.
WOMAN #1:
I won’t survive, I’ve been awake so long.
These stupid honking owls won’t take a rest.

LYSISTRATA:
Magical stuff—shut up about it, hey?
You want your men. You don’t think they want you?
They’re spending nasty nights outside your beds.

WOMAN #3:
Dear ladies, just be patient for a bit,
And see our project through, clear to the end.
An oracle assures us that we’ll win
If we’re united. Here, I’ve got the text.

LYSISTRATA:
Be quiet and I’ll read.

(She takes out a scroll.)

LYSISTRATA:
Swallows will come together, huddling close—
Fleeing hoopoes—renouncing phallices—
Bad things will end, when Zeus the Thunderer
Brings low the lofty—

WOMAN #3:
Hmmm, we’ll be on top?

LYSISTRATA:
But if the bickering birds fly separate ways,
Leaving the sacred temple, it will show
That—swallows are the world’s most shameless trash.

WOMAN #3:
The sacred words are plain. Oh, help us, gods.

LYSISTRATA:
We won’t give in to hassles, but persist.
Let’s go inside. It would be a disgrace
To prove unworthy of the oracle.

(The women exit into the stage building.)

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
When I was a boy, I heard a tale
I’d like to share with you.
There was a young man named Melanion.
They told him to get married, and he said, “Pooh!”
He fled to the mountains, where he lived,
Hunting hares.
He had a great dog,
And he wove his own snares.
He never went home. His hatred
Continued burning bright.
And we hate women just as much,
Because we know what’s right.

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Give me a kiss, you hag.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Oh, yuck, that onion smell!

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
And now a hearty kick!

(Crotch shows as he lifts leg.)

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Chain up your animal!

gullible indeed. The allusion is to the myth of Philomela and Tereus, who were said to have been transformed into a swallow and a hoopoe after a particularly bad episode of domestic abuse and revenge.

110. Associated with Athena.
An untranslatable pun on the word “coot.”
111. An untranslatable pun on the word “coot.”
112. Lysistrata’s ploy reflects skepticism about oracles among Greek intellectuals like Aristophanes. Clients (like this group of women) could not see the genesis of an oracle within the special shrine. They had to accept whatever was brought out to them. Moreover, no such shrine was on the Acropolis; where does Lysistrata get her text? These women are
113. Melanion is perhaps a deliberately odd choice as an archetypal misogynist. Elsewhere the myth stresses that he went to the wilderness to be near his beloved, the huntress Atalanta.
114. A line of uncertain meaning. However, the mention of an onion in connection with a kiss seems to point toward an interpretation like mine.
MEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
Myronides and Phormion\textsuperscript{115} were formidably furred:
Their enemies took one look at them and ran.
A nest of black hair in the crack at the back
Is the sign of a genuine man.

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN:
805 It's our turn to tell you a tale.
(We don't like the Melanion one.)
810 Timon once lurked in the thorns,
A wild man, the Ghouls' foster son\textsuperscript{116}
He stayed away
Till his dying day,
815 Cursing mankind with venom.
He loathed all of you,
The same as we do,
But was always a sweetie to women.\textsuperscript{117}

WOMEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
Shall I bash your jaw?

MEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
I'll be so sore!

WOMEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
A kick at least.

\textit{(Her leg is lifted, threatening a view of crotch.)}

MEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
Talk about beasts!

WOMEN'S CHORUS LEADER:
Fine, but I'm glad that mine
Doesn't run wild and free.
Though I'm not especially young,
I groom it tenderly.\textsuperscript{118}

\textit{(The choruses step back.)}

(Lysistrata appears on the roof of the stage building.)

LYSISTRATA:
Whoopie! Get over here, you women, quick!
(Enter Woman #1, Myrrhine, and several other
women onto the roof.)

WOMAN #1: What is it? Tell me what you're squalling at.

LYSISTRATA:
A man—he's coming in a frenzied charge,
With Aphrodite's offering—of meat.
O Queen of Cyprus and of Cythera
And Paphos! (Yeah, bud, come \textit{straight up} to us!)

WOMAN #1: Where is our mystery man?

LYSISTRATA: By Chloe's shrine.\textsuperscript{119}

WOMAN #1: No question—that thing's male. Who could he be?

LYSISTRATA: All of you look. Does someone know him?

MYRRHINE:
Zeus!

I do. My husband—it's Cinesias.\textsuperscript{120}

LYSISTRATA: Your duty is to roast him on that spit.
You will, you won't, you might—just lead him on.
Remember, though: you swore on booze—no sex!

MYRRHINE:
Leave it to me.

\textsuperscript{115} Two Athenian war heroes.
\textsuperscript{116} "A piece broken off the Furies," hideous, vengeful goddesses of the
Underworld.
\textsuperscript{117} Timon was a fifth-century B.C.E. Athenian legendary for misan-
thropy but not misandry. This example is almost as distorted as that of
Melanion.
\textsuperscript{118} See line 89 and note.
\textsuperscript{119} A spot sacred to Demeter Chloe ("Demeter of Greenery").
\textsuperscript{120} From the Greek word for "fuck."
LYSISTRATA:
  But I'll stay here and pull
  The opening stunts and get him all worked up
  For you to play with. Go back in and hide.

  (All the women but Lysistrata exit. Enter Cinesias,
  with his Slave, who is carrying Cinesias' Baby. A
  giant codpiece hangs from Cinesias' waist. Lysistrata
  descends by ladder or through the stage building to
  meet Cinesias.)

CINESIAS:

I'm screwed—I mean I'm not! I'm stretched so tight
Skilled torture couldn't do a better job.

LYSISTRATA:
  Who's gotten past the sentinels?

CALONICE:
  It's me.

LYSISTRATA:
  A man?

CINESIAS:
  Yeah, can't you see?

LYSISTRATA:
  I see. Get lost.

CINESIAS:
  Who's going to throw me out?

LYSISTRATA:
  The lookout. Me.

CINESIAS:

I need Myrrhine. Call her for me—please.

LYSISTRATA:
  Myrrhine? Huh? You need her? Who are you?

CINESIAS:
  Her husband. I'm Cinesias from—121

121. The Greek text includes the deme name, which is a double-entendre
  in line with Cinesias' name. See previous note.

LYSISTRATA:

Hey!

I know you, or I've often heard your name.
All of us know it. You're quite famous here.
Your wife's mouth never takes a break from you.
She toasts you every time she has a snack—
Smooth eggs, or juicy apples—

CINESIAS:

Gods! O gods!

LYSISTRATA:

Just Aphrodite. When we mention men,
That wife of yours declares without delay:
"They're all a pile of crud compared to mine."

CINESIAS:

Call her, c'mon.

LYSISTRATA:

And what's it worth to you?

CINESIAS:

What have I got on me? Oh, right, there's this.
It's all I have, but you can take it and—

LYSISTRATA:

There, now. I'll call her down to you.

CINESIAS:

And fast.

(Lysistrata exits into stage building.)

There's nothing now in life to bring me joy.
She left the house! She left me on my own!
When I return at night, the whole place seems
So empty, and I ache. The food has got
No taste for me. All I can feel is dick.

(Myrrhine appears on the roof of the stage building,
calling behind her.)

MYRRHINE:

I love him, oh, I do! He won't accept
My yearning love. Don't make me go out there.
Clinesias: Myrrhine, I don't get it, baby doll. Come down here.

Myrrhine: That event will not occur.

Clinesias: I call, Myrrhine, and you won't come down?

Myrrhine: What the hell for? Why are you bothering?

Clinesias: What for? To keep my prick from crushing me.

Myrrhine: See you around.

Clinesias: No—listen to your son.

(To Baby.) You little—call your Mama, or I'll—

Baby: Waaaah!

Clinesias: Mama! Mama! Mama!

Clinesias: What's wrong with you? No feeling for your child? Six days he's gone without a bath or food.

Myrrhine: Poor baby. Daddy doesn't give a hoot.

Clinesias: Monster, at least come down and feed your whelp.

Myrrhine: Ah, motherhood! What choice do I have now?

(She descends and approaches him.)

Clinesias: (Aside.)

Maybe my mind's just soggy, but she seems Wonderfully young—her face has such allure. And see that snippy way she struts along. It's making me so horny I could croak.

Myrrhine: (Taking Baby.) My lovey-pie—too bad about your Dad. Give Mommy kiss, my honey-dumpling-bun.

Clinesias: What are you up to here? What have they done To lure you off? Why are you hurting me? You're hurting too!

(He reaches for her.)

Myrrhine: Your hand can stop right there.

Clinesias: My stuff at home—it's your stuff too—is shot Since you've been gone.

Myrrhine: My, my, that's too, too bad.

Clinesias: That nicest cloth of yours—the hens got in— You ought to see it.

Myrrhine: Only if I cared.

Clinesias: And all this time we've ditched the rituals Of Aphrodite. Aren't you coming back?

Myrrhine: Not me, by Zeus, unless you make a deal To stop this war.

Clinesias: If that's the way we vote, That's what we'll do.

Myrrhine: Then you trot off and vote, And I'll trot home. For now, I've sworn to stay.

Clinesias: Then lie down here with me. It's been so long.
MYRRHINE: No, not a chance—in spite of how I feel.

CINESIAS: You love me? Honey, then why not lie down?

MYRRHINE: Don’t be ridiculous! The baby’s here.


(Slave takes Baby back and exits.)

There, do you see a baby anymore?
So if you’d just—

910 MYRRHINE: You’re crazy! Where’s a spot
To do it here?

CINESIAS: Uh, there’s the grove of Pan.

MYRRHINE: And how am I to purify myself?

CINESIAS: No sweat. There’s the Clepsydra you can use.122

MYRRHINE: I swore an oath. And now I break my word?

CINESIAS: Forget your oath. ‘Cause that’s my lookout, huh?

MYRRHINE: I’ll get a cot for us.

CINESIAS: No, stay right here.
The ground is fine.

MYRRHINE: Apollo help me, no!
Stretch till you twang, before I lay you there!

---

122. A spring. She could not return to the sacred ground of the Acropolis without bathing.
CINESIAS: Oh, what an epic prank on my poor prick!\(^{123}\)

(She returns with a pillow.)

MYRRHINE: Head up. (She places the pillow under his head.) I've got the whole collection now.

CINESIAS: I'm sure you do. Come here, my cutie-sweet.

MYRRHINE: Just let me get this bra off. One more time: You wouldn't lead me on about the peace?

CINESIAS: If I do that, Zeus strike me dead.

MYRRHINE: A sheet!

CINESIAS: By Zeus, forget the sheet! I want to screw!

MYRRHINE: Don't worry, you'll get screwed. I'll be right back.

(She exits.)

CINESIAS: She's going to decorate until I die.

(She enters with a sheet.)

MYRRHINE: Up just a little. (She spreads the sheet under him.)

CINESIAS: (Indicating penis.) How is this for up?

MYRRHINE: Do you want oil?

---

123. "This penis is being entertained [like] Heracles." A common motif in comedy was the teasing and cheating of this greedy, lustful god.

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Lysistrata

CINESIAS: No! By Apollo! No!

MYRRHINE: My, looks like you don't know what's good for you.

(She exits.)

CINESIAS: Great Zeus in heaven, make the bottle spill!

(She returns with oil bottle.)

MYRRHINE: Hold out your hand, take some, and spread it on.

(He takes a sample.)

CINESIAS: Yuck, I don't like it. All I smell's delay. It's got no nuance of my wife and sex.

MYRRHINE: Well, shame on me! I brought the one from Rhodes.

CINESIAS: No, never mind, it's perfect.

MYRRHINE: You're a dork.

(She exits.)

CINESIAS: Perfume's inventor ought to cram the stuff.

(She enters, offers him a bottle.)

MYRRHINE: Take this.

CINESIAS: I've got one that's about to crack!\(^{124}\)

Lie down, you tramp! Don't bring me anything!

---

124. Oil bottles, about the size and shape of an erect penis, made for good sight gags.
MYRRHINE:
Okay, I'm lying down.
(She perches on edge of bed.)
I've only got
To get my shoes off. Honey, don't forget:
You're voting for a treaty.

CINEIAS:
I'll assess—
(She dashes away and exits.)
Shit! Shit! She's gone. She rubbed me out and ran.
She plucked my cock,\textsuperscript{125} consigning me to dust.

Oh, woe! Whom shall I screw?\textsuperscript{126}
The loveliest one is gone.
Who'll take this orphan on?
I need a pimp! Hey, you—\textsuperscript{127}
Go hire me a nanny for my dong.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
Misery, woe on woe!
Lo, I brim over with compassion:
You're foully swindled of your ration!
Forsoth, your guts are going to blow!
How will your nuts remain
Intact? Will you not go insane?
Your manly parts are out of luck
Without their regular morning fuck.

CINEIAS:
Great Zeus, how dreadfully I twitch!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
That's from the world's most evil bitch.

---

125. The image is of the foreskin pulled back in agonized readiness for sex. See lines 735–40 and note, and line 1136.
126. The following exchange is a parody of the exchange with the chorus at the crisis of a tragedy.
127. In the Greek text, Cinesias summons “Dog-Fox,” the nickname of the procurer Philostratus; many of Aristophanes' comic victims would have been sitting in the theater, so actors may be imagined addressing them directly.

She tortured you, the filthy cheat.

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN:
No, no! She's absolutely sweet.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN:
She's a curse. She's a disease.

CINEIAS:
She is! O Zeus, please, please!
You know the way your whirlwind flips
And flings the brush piles that it whips?
And twists and loops them in a blur,
And dumps them down? Do that to her.
But when you let her touch the ground
She must land tidily around
My prong, okay? And right away?

(Enter Spartan Herald, bent over and holding his cloak out in front. Cinesias has recovered enough of his composure to face him.)

SPARTAN HERALD:
Where do you find the Elders in this town?
No, sorry, your—Directors?\textsuperscript{128} I got news.

CINEIAS:
Are you a human being or a pole?\textsuperscript{129}

SPARTAN HERALD:
By the Twin Gods,\textsuperscript{130} I've come official-like
From Sparta, 'cause we need to compromise.

CINEIAS:
Then please explain that pike beneath your clothes.

---

128. Sparta was governed differently, and Spartans were notoriously parochial. This herald names the Council of Elders (Spartan) and then the prytaneis (Athenian, translated here as “Directors”). The Athenian administrative year was divided into ten parts, during each of which fifty different members—the Prytany Council—of the Council of Five Hundred presided.
129. “Corisalus,” a fertility spirit represented with a giant phallus.
130. Castor and Polydeuces.
SPARTAN HERALD: (Dodging Cinesias’ eyes.)
I swear, it’s nothing.

CINESIAS:
But you’re turned away.
Your cloak is hiding something. Have you got
Some swelling from the ride?

SPARTAN HERALD: (Aside.)
His mind is gone.

CINESIAS:
Come on, you scamming bastard, it’s a bone!

SPARTAN HERALD:
By Zeus, it ain’t. Back off, you crazy fart.

CINESIAS:
What is it, then?

SPARTAN HERALD:
Uh, it’s a Spartan staff. 131

CINESIAS: (Opening cloak.)
Then here’s a Spartan staff that’s just changed sides.
I know the whole thing. You can tell the truth
About what Lacedaemon’s going through.

SPARTAN HERALD:
Well, us and our confederate states is stuck.
Stuck standing up. We need to snatch a piece. 132

CINESIAS:
And who’s the source of this catastrophe?
Pan. 133

SPARTAN HERALD:
No, Lampito—I think it was her plan.
And then all over Sparta, when they heard,
The women thundered from the starting line—
There went our pussy in a cloud of dust.

CINESIAS:
How are you making out, then?

SPARTAN HERALD:
Hey, we’re not.
The whole damn town’s bent double like we’s kicked. 134
Before we lay a finger on a twat,
The women say we gotta all wise up
And make a treaty with the other Greeks.

CINESIAS:
They got together and they plotted this,
All of the women. I can see it now.
Quick, have the Spartans send ambassadors,
Fully empowered to reach a settlement.
And on the evidence of this my dick
I’ll make our Council choose some legates too.

SPARTAN HERALD:
I’m off. You got the whole thing figured out.
(They exit.)

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
To get on top of women—try a fire,
It’s easier. A leopard’s got more shame.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
And knowing this, you won’t give up this fight,
When you can always trust me as a friend?

MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
Women revolt. And it stays that way.

WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:
There’s lots of time. But I can’t bear to see

131. These staffs were an early coding device. One remained in Sparta, and a Spartan diplomat abroad carried one of the exact same size and shape. A message was written on a strip wound around one staff and had to be wound around the duplicate staff to be deciphered.
132. “We need Pelleon.” The name plays on those of a prostitute and of a territory Sparta coveted.
133. The god Pan (the origin of our word “panic”) was thought to induce various kinds of mass afflictions.
134. The image in the Greek is of men bent over, protecting lighted lamps from the wind.
You standing garmentless. You look absurd.
I’ll come and put this cloak back over you.

(She drapes it around him.)

**MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
By Zeus, you’ve done a thing that isn’t vile.
I stripped when I was raging for a fight.

**WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
Now you’re a man again, and not a clown.
If you were nice, I might have grabbed that beast
Still lodging in your eye, and plucked him out.

**MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
So that’s what’s galling me. Here, take my ring.
Gouge out the critter, let me see him. Gods,
All day he’s masticated in that lair.

**WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
For sure, here goes. But what a grouchy guy.

(Removes bug.)

Oh, Zeus, I’ve never seen a gnat this big.
Just look. It’s like some monster from the swamp.\(^{135}\)

**MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
You helped. That thing was excavating me . . .
And now it’s gone. There’s water in my eyes.

**WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
I’ll wipe it off, though you’ve been quite a pain.

(She wipes his face and kisses him.)

And here’s a kiss.

**MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
No—

**WOMEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
It’s not up to you!

**MEN’S CHORUS LEADER:**
Up your wazo! You’re born to flatter us!

---

The adage says it all: that women are
Abomination indispensable.
But let’s make peace, and in the time to come
I’ll neither dump on you nor take your crap.
Let’s all line up and dance to celebrate.

(The two choruses unite and address the
audience.)

**UNITED CHORUS:**
Gentlemen, I don’t mean to call
A fellow citizen a snot or blot
Or anything like that at all.
No, au contraire! I’ll be much more than fair!
Sufficient are the evils that you’ve got.\(^{136}\)
Man or woman, just tell me
If you’d like a bit—
Two thousand, or, say, three—\(^{137}\)
I’ve got so much of it.
We’ll even give you bags to haul it.
In peaceful times we won’t recall it:
Just keep the goodies from our coffers.
Oops: we’ve forgotten what we offered.

We’ve just invited really swell
Carystians, from overseas.\(^{138}\)
We’re going to entertain them well,
With perfectly braised, tenderly glazed
Piglet served with purée of peas.
Spruce yourself up (don’t leave out
The kids!) and come today.
March in, nothing to ask about,
And no one in the way.
Barge boldly to the doors.
Pretend the place is yours.
Don’t even bother to knock—
It’s going to be locked.

---

135. Tricorythus is the swampy area named.
136. Abuse of the audience was a long-standing comic tradition.
137. "Two or three minas," the equivalent of several thousand dollars.
138. See line 1181 and note.
(The Spartan Ambassadors approach, bent over, holding their cloaks out in front, trying to conceal massive erections. Slaves accompany them.)

UNITED CHORUS LEADER:
Here come the Spartan legates, beards a-drag—
In clothing that looks draped around a crate.
Laconian gentlemen, our best to you!
Tell us in what condition you've arrived.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
This isn't gonna take a wordy talk.

(Opens cloak.)
A look-see for yourselves should do the trick.

UNITED CHORUS LEADER:
Oh, wow. The situation's pretty tense,
A crisis getting more and more enflamed.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
It's crazy. Anyway, what's there to say?
We'll accept any kind of terms for peace.

(Enter Athenian Ambassadors, like the Spartans under obvious strain. Slaves accompany them also.)

UNITED CHORUS LEADER:
These natives have a tic a lot like yours,
Of bending down like wrestlers, with a lot
Of room for something underneath their cloaks.

They have some hypertrophy of the groin.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1: (To United Chorus.)
Where's Lysistrata? Someone's got to know.

(Pulls cloak aside to display contents, gestures toward Spartans.)

We're here, they're here, but both are way up there.

UNITED CHORUS LEADER:
I seem to see a certain parallel
Between these two diseases—cramps at dawn?

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Worse, we've arrived at wits' and gonads' end.
If we don't hurry and negotiate,
We'll have to make a date with Cleisthenes.139

UNITED CHORUS LEADER:
If I were you, I'd cover up those things.
What if a prankster with a chisel sees?140

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
That's good advice.

(Covers himself.)

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
By the Twin Gods, it is.
We better wrap these bigger duds around.

(Covers himself likewise.)

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Greetings to you, dear Spartans. We've been stiffed.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
And us, too, pal. Maybe the audience
Could see that we was playing with ourselves.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Let's get through our agenda double-quick.
What do you want?

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
We're the ambassadors.
We're here about a treaty.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
So are we.
But only Lysistrata's up to it.
Let's ask her. She can be the referee.

139. See line 621 and note.
140. The chorus warn about the "Herm-cutters," whoever cut the penises off the Hermes, or guardian statues in front of houses, before the Sicilian expedition starting in 415 B.C.E. The disastrous outcome of the expedition was thought to owe something to the bad omen.
SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
Lysis or Strata—anyone who can.\textsuperscript{141}

(Enter Lysistrata.)

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
It looks like there's no need for us to call.
She heard us. She's already coming out.

UNITED CHORUS LEADER:
You who've got by far the biggest balls of all,
Show you've got the greatest tact and gall of all!
Be high-class, low-class, sweet, self-righteous—everything.
Every last minister in Greece now stumbles
Under your spell, surrendering his grumbles.

LYSISTRATA:
It's not hard work. You only have to swoop
The moment when they're bursting for a deal.
But here's the test. Goddess of Deals, come out!

(Reconciliation, an actor in a body stocking padded to
look like a nude woman, enters.)

To start with, take the Spartans by the hand—
And don't get rough, don't have it all your way;
Don't wreck it like our stupid husbands did.
Be gentle as a mother in her house—
But if he pulls his hand back, take his dong.

Lead the Athenians to center stage.
(Anything you can grab can be the leash.)
Laconian gentlemen, stand close to me,
And our guys here, and hear my reasons out.

(Reconciliation has arranged the Athenian and
Spartan Ambassadors on either side of Lysistrata.)

I am a woman, but I have a mind
That wasn't bad to start with, and I got
A first-class education listening

141. A joke on the name Lysistrata (see note 1): "Also Lysistratus [a male
Lysistrata; there was an Athenian of this name, whom the comic play-
wrights mock] if you want." In either case, the name means that peace
will be made.

To Father and the elders year on year.
I now shall do what's right and give you hell
Together, for a single holy bowl
Sprinkles fraternal altars at the games:
Delphic, Pylaean, and Olympic.\textsuperscript{142}
I could go on and on and on and on!
You see barbarian armies threatening,\textsuperscript{143}
But you destroy the towns and lives of Greeks.
That's quite a climax to my preface, huh?

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
What? This bald behemoth is killing me.\textsuperscript{144}

LYSISTRATA:
Laconians, I'm turning now to you.
Don't you remember how a supplicant
From Sparta, Pericleidas, roosted here,
Next to the altar,\textsuperscript{145} pale (his uniform
Bright red), and begged for troops. Messene and
Poseidon both at once had shaken you.
And Cimon took four thousand armored men
And made your territory safe again.\textsuperscript{146}
After this gift from the Athenians,
You come and rip their land apart as thanks?

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Right, Lysistrata! Bunch of criminals!

(Spartan Ambassador is enthralled by
Reconciliation.)

142. A number of international festival competitions helped the Hel-
lenic world in its self-definition. The Olympics were held at Pisa, the
Pylaeae at Thermopylae, and the Pythia at Delphi.
143. The Persian empire hovered continually, looking for advantages.
144. See lines 735–40 and note, and line 953.
145. A supplicant gave his request religious meaning by putting himself
under the gods' protection while making it.
146. This seems an odd choice of example. After an earthquake (Posei-
don was thought to cause earthquakes) and the revolt of the Messenian
helots (or serfs) in 464 B.C.E., the general Cimon did go to Sparta, but the
Spartans were suspicious and sent him home before he had a chance to
help. The episode caused much bad feeling between the two states.
SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
I guess we are—that’s such a gorgeous ass.\(^{147}\)

LYSISTRATA:
You think I’m going to spare my countrymen?

(Turns to Athenians.)

1150 Laconians once came to rescue you—
You only had the sheepskins on your backs.
The Spartans, marching out with you one day,
Erased large numbers of Thessalian goons.
A single ally made you Hippias-free:

1155 Denuded of the rags of refugees,
And draped in your own polity again.\(^{148}\)

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR: (Staring at Reconciliation.)
I never seen a woman so first-rate.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1: (Staring likewise.)
I’ve never gazed on such a spiffy quim.

LYSISTRATA:
With these good deeds already on the tab,
Why squabble like a bunch of stupid jerks?
Be reconciled. There’s nothing in the way.

(In the following scene, Reconciliation serves
as a map.)

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
Okay, if we can have this little loop,
We’re in.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
What’s that, my friend?

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
Pylos, I mean.

For years we’ve tried to get a finger in.\(^{149}\)

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147. Literally, “rectum,” the notorious Spartan preference.
148. The Spartans helped exiled Athenian clans to overthrow the tyranny of Hippias (with his Thessalian cavalry bodyguards) in 510 B.C.E.
149. It was of great strategic importance that the Athenians had controlled the fortified city of Pylos, on the western coast of the Peloponnesian,

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Poseidon help me, that you will not do.

LYSISTRATA:
Let go.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
But I’ve got uprisings to quell!

LYSISTRATA:
Just ask them for another piece instead.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Give me this thingy—this cute brushy bit,
And this deep gulf behind, which I’ll explore—
And these nice legs of land: I want them too.\(^{150}\)

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
Buddy, you can’t have every friggin’ thing!

LYSISTRATA:
Hey! Make some compromise and part the legs.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
I’m going to strip right down and start to plow.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
I’m going to spread manure on my field.\(^{151}\)

LYSISTRATA:
And you can do it when you’re reconciled.
If you’re quite ready for a settlement,
Then scatter and confer with your allies.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Why bother? Situated in my prong.

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since 425 B.C.E. The lines include a pun on “anus,” another reference to the Spartans’ alleged predilection.

150. A series of geographical puns. The name of the Spartan ally Echino- nous sounds like the Greek for “sea urchin” or “hedgehog,” indicating pubic hair. Echino is here mentioned as on the Malian Gulf, “gulf” probably meaning the vagina. The “Megarian legs” were strategic walls.
151. The poet Hesiod orders farmers to plow, sow, and reap “naked,” i.e., without their outer garments. Again, Aristophanes jokes about Spartans and anal sex.
They'll judge precisely as I do. They'll want
To screw—

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
And ours are just like yours, I swear—

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
And our Carysians especially.152

LYSISTRATA:
You're both correct! While you're still abstinent,
We'll have the women on the citadel
Open their boxes for you.153 You can feast
And then exchange your pledges of good faith.
Then each of you can take his wife and go
Straight home—

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Finally. Let's not stand around.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
Show me—

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
The fastest exit we can make.

(Lysistrata and the Ambassadors exit together,
leaving the slaves, who settle down outside the
stage building.)

UNITED CHORUS:
Embroidered throws to beat the cold,
Dresses and capes—none better, a
Big pile of jewelry, solid gold—
Send kids to take the stuff away.
For Basket-Bearing girls,154 et cetera.
"Help yourselves," I always say,
"To anything you find.

I don't seal up the jars or check
What money's left behind."
In fact, there's nothing left at all,
Unless I'm going blind.

Not enough bread,
But slaves to feed,
And hosts of hungry kids?
I've got plenty of bay-fine wheat
For every citizen in need.
This dust grows into strapping loaves to eat.
Come in—bring duffel bags and sacks!
My slave will stuff them full with any
Dry goods that you lack.
Too bad my dog will fuck you up.
He's waiting at the back.

(Backs sprawl sleepily in front of stage building.
Thick-voiced Athenian Ambassador #1 pounds on the
door from inside.)

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Open!

(Barges through, knocking slave in front of door out of
the way. Ambassador is garlanded, unsteady on his
feet, and carrying a torch.)

That's what you get for bein' there!

(Begins kicking and pushing dazed slaves.)

And you guys too—what if I take this torch
And carbonize you? (To audience.) What a dumb cliché.156
I'm not going through with it. Okay! Calm down!
To make you happy I can play a boob.

(Athenian Ambassador #2, similar in appearance,
enters from same door.)

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #2:
I'll help. Two boobs beat one—like this one here.

152. Several sexual puns are possible on the name of these important
allies of Athens.
153. See lines 912–3 and note; men as well as women were forbidden to
enter a holy place immediately after sex. The ironic double-entendre on
"boxes" is original in the Greek.
154. See line 646 and note.
155. Coins were stored in sealed jars.
156. The slapstick of beating slaves and chasing them with torches was
overused in Old Comedy but seems to have been a crowd pleaser.
(Assaults slave.)
Haul ass! Or you'll be howling for your hair.

Athenian Ambassador #1:
Threw yourselves out! Our Spartan guests inside
Don't want to kick their way through piles of you.

(Slaves flee.)

Athenian Ambassador #2:
I've never seen a party good as this.
Those Spartans sure are fun—now who'da thought?
And we're a damn sight smarter when we're drunk.

Athenian Ambassador #1:
I tell ya, being sober's bad for us.
I'm gonna move that anyone we send
Anywhere to negotiate, get sloshed.
The trouble's been, we're sober when we go
To Sparta, so we're spoilers from the start.
What they do say, we're not prepared to hear.
And everything they don't say, we assume.

Athenian Ambassador #1:
We've all got different versions in the end.
But now we're fine. Someone sang "Telamon"
When what we wanted was "Cleitagon".157
We slapped him on the back and told him, "Great!"

(Slaves slink back onstage.)
I can't believe those slaves are comin' back.

Get out! The whip is looking for you guys.

(Slaves exit. Spartan Ambassadors enter, with a Piper.)

Athenian Ambassador #2:
Already we've got Spartans walking through.

Spartan Ambassador: (To Piper.)
Hey, my best buddy, can we hear the pipes?
There's something good I got to dance and sing.
It's for our friends in Athens—and for us.

Athenian Ambassador #1:
Zeus blast us if those pipes can't use a blast.
It's wonderful to watch you Spartans dance.

(The Piper strikes up a tune.)

Spartan Ambassador:
Memory, rouse, for my young sake,
The Muse who knows of both our nations:
How, godlike, the Athenians at Artemisium
Smashed the hulls of the Medes and were victorious,
While Leonidas led us Spartans
Fierce as boars sharpening their tusks;
Foam blossomed over our jaws,
Ran down our legs.
The Persians were as
Many as the sand grains,158
Huntress in the wilderness,
Come to us, O holy virgin,
Bless our treaty,
Unite us forever.
May our friendship
Never be troubled.
May our bond turn us
From wily foxes into men.
Come, O come,
Maiden with your pack of hounds.159

(Enter Lysistrata with the Athenian and Spartan Women.)

Athenian Ambassador #1:
All but one thing is nicely put to bed.
Reclaim your wives,160 Laconians, and we
Will take our own. Each woman by her man,
And each man by his woman, celebrate,
Give thanks in joyful dances for the gods,
And vow to never go so wrong again.

157. Traditional drinking songs based on mythology and legend.

158. In 480 B.C.E., the Athenians fought the Persian navy off Artemisium in Euboea, while the Spartans held the pass at Thermopylae against the Persian infantry.

159. Artemis.

160. The hostages mentioned in line 244.
(The couples join the United Chorus, and all
dance in pairs.)

Bring on the dancers, invite the Graces,
Call Artemis and her twin, God of the joyous cry,
To lead the dance; and call the god of Nysa,
His eyes glittering, companion of the maenads;
And Zeus of the lightning bolt, and his blessed consort,\textsuperscript{161}
And all the spirits\textsuperscript{162} as witnesses
Forever mindful of gentle Peace,
Whom the goddess Cypris\textsuperscript{163} gave us.

UNITED CHORUS:
Shout to the gods,
Leap up, rejoice.
A victory dance,
A holy song!

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR #1:
Add a new song to my new song.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR:
Spartan Muse, come once more,
Leave your pretty Taygetus.\textsuperscript{164}
Help us hymn in fitting words Apollo in Amyclae,\textsuperscript{165}
And Athena of the Bronze House,\textsuperscript{166}
And the noble children of Tyndareos
Who play beside the Eurotas,\textsuperscript{167}
Start off lightly
And jump up high.
Sing for Sparta,
Where thudding feet
Worship the gods.

\textsuperscript{161} Apollo was Artemis' twin. Dionysus had ecstatic female worshipers, the maenads. Hera was Zeus' wife.
\textsuperscript{162} The daimones or minor deities.
\textsuperscript{163} Aphrodite.
\textsuperscript{164} See line 117 and note.
\textsuperscript{165} This shrine of his was outside the city of Sparta.
\textsuperscript{166} A temple in Sparta.
\textsuperscript{167} Castor and Polydeuces; Sparta's famous river.

The girls like colts
Leap by the river.
Their steps pound.
The dust rises.
They frisk and shake their hair
Like bacchantes with their wands.
And Leda's daughter leads them,
Lovely, holy patroness of the chorus.\textsuperscript{168}

Tie your hair back, let your footsteps fall
With the speed of a deer's, and clap your hands.
Our Goddess of the Bronze House has victory over all.

(All exit, singing and dancing.)

\textsuperscript{168} Helen was worshiped as a goddess in Sparta.